DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 046 535 PS 004 232

TITLE	Children and Their Physical and Social Environment. 1970 White House Conference on Children, Report of Forum 19. (Working Copy).
INSTITUTION	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	70
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Childhood Needs, *National Programs, Objectives, *Physical Environment, *Planning Commissions, Public Policy, *Social Environment

ABSTRACT

We want an environment that is good for all our children to grow up in and reach their full potential. They need an environment that gives them many kinds of experiences, that provides both privacy and opportunities to form social bonds, and that is enriched by beauty. To provide such an environment for our children, we must also provide it for adults. Unfortunately, our public policies and programs have shaped a world which is inhospitable to both. Policies for land use, transportation, taxation, zoning, and housing have limited opportunities for cooperation among groups segregated by these policies. One of our major national goals should focus on planning and providing for an environment that is good in every sense for the creative growth of both children and adults. We recommend the establishment of a standing Commission for the Coming Generation. The Commission would take a broad view of national policies and programs--not only those specifically directed toward children--and act as an advocate for the young in all fields. (Author/WY)

ED046535

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

EMBARGO
NOT FOR RELEASE UNTIL 12 NOON
DECEMBER 8, 1970

CHILDREN AND THEIR PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Report of Forum 19

1970 White House Conference on Children

PS004232

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

SUMMARY

We want an environment that is good for all our children to grow up in and reach their full potential. They need an environment that gives them access to all sorts of experiences, that allows them to control their experiences, that provides both privacy and opportunities to form social bonds, and that is enriched by beauty.

To provide such an environment for our children, we must also provide it for adults. The world of children is not separate from that of adults, and no imaginable "special facilities" for children can counterbalance the experience of growing up in an inhumane world.

Our public policies and programs shape a world which is in many ways inhospitable to the life of children and to their full, creative growth.

Our failure to develop proper controls on land use and the natural environment means that land is devoured by urban sprawl and the environment contaminated by pollution.

Our processes for planning transportation result in the neighborhoods of the most powerless citizens sliced through by superhighways which serve the minority -- the suburban auto commuters -- rather than those most in need -- the poor, the old, or the young.

Our housing programs leave untouched the needs of many of our children, who grow up in overcrowded, squalid dwellings that drain far too much of the family's income in rent.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

Our exclusionary zoning practices and our systems of taxation segregate our children and their families by race and class and, by means both direct and subtle, operate to deny equal opportunity. Our planning processes make no provision for community participation.

The goal is an environment that is good in every sense for the life and creative growth of both children and adults.

Our principal recommendation is the establishment of a standing Commission for the Coming Generation. The Commission would take a broad view of national policies and programs -- not only those specifically directed toward children -- and act as an advocate, in all fields, for the young. It would conduct hearings and carry out research on how our policies shape the environment for human growth. And it would be charged with the task of bringing to the attention of the nation all ways in which policies or programs should be changed in the interest of a better environment for children.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

A PLACE TO GROW UP IN

We want an environment that is good for our children -- all our children -- to grow up in.

Every baby comes into the world with unique individual potential. We want an environment that will make it possible for all our children to grow to the utmost fullness of humanity that is possible for them. We want them to be healthy, inquisitive, energetic, creative, adventurous, affectionate, trusting, honest, able to meet and solve problems, and sensually alive.

We know a lot about making environments good for children. A well-designed playground is an example. It is attractive, and facilitates human interaction and individual learning. It gives children a chance to dare, to experiment, and to take risks without too much danger. It is a place where children can build and create. It gives children the chance to try out many kinds of experience, and to choose and control the experiences they have. It has places to be alone and undisturbed, and places where children can come together to make new friends and learn new things. Such a playground displays many of the properties of a healthy environment for growing children and proves that it is in our power to create such environments.

But children cannot live only in playgrounds. Children live and grow up in the same world as adults. To provide an environment that is good for all our children, we must create a humane world for adults.

A

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

All our children cannot live in homes that are healthy and comfortable and joyful with space to call their own, unless there are enough homes for all American families at prices within their reach. Children cannot play and learn in a world of security and trust unless the adults around them feel secure and trusting. The anxieties of adults -- whether fear of nuclear war, distrust of police, or worry about the rent -- are transmitted to their children.

Vast suburban areas are out of the financial reach of poor families, both black and white. Thus the children as well as the adults of the central city ghettos are separated from those of the suburbs. The experience of each group is limited, to the detriment of both.

Pollution or destruction of the natural environment destroys the heritage of all Americans. A good world for children implies a humane world for everybody.

The United States is a new thing in human history: a society with the technical capacity to feed, house, and clothe all its members confortably, and to create a good environment for all its children to grow up in. But we have not given priority to these accomplishments; we have become involved in other pursuits; and we are far from creating an environment good for the growth of all our children.

Consider housing. The President's Committee on Urban Housing calculated that the nation would have to provide, over ten years, 26 million new and rehabilitated housing units, including at least six million subsidized units for lower income families.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

The Housing Act of 1968 adopted that figure as a national goal. Yet because of our current monetary policies, which make it impossible for the private sector to measure up to its technical capacity, and because of the failure of Congress to provide the funds needed for subsidies, we are not even close to making good on our commitment. Even including mobile homes (and should our measures for solving the housing deficit rely so heavily on mobile homes? what does this mean for children?), we are already 2.2 million units short of our quota, and the trend, instead of rising steadily, is downward.

At current prices, only the upper income half of our families can afford to buy decent shelter. Yet we are producing only about 50,000 subsidized units annually, at a cost of $1.25 billion, compared to an average of our 71 billion spent annually 1962 through 1967 for military preparedness. Ten million children live in families with incomes below the poverty level. Chances of a poor kid's growing up with the pride and security of "his own home" are slim. In 1966, a family of four earning $5000 a year could buy an $8000 house only by finding a thirty-year loan at three percent. Lower income, more children, or higher financing costs meant back to the slum tenement. Housing costs are still rising, and our programs are not meeting the needs of our people. Unless we change our policies to provide more housing, especially subsidized housing for lower income families, many more children will be growing up in slum apartments.

Consider transportation. Since World War II, in a period of accelerated urban migration and suburban development, our

public transit services have actually declined -- even in densely populated areas. The major transportation load is still within cities, rather than between cities and suburbs. But nearly all major urban transportation investment has been devoted to the needs of the minority by augmenting the familiar radial-circumferential patterns of freeways to serve automobile traffic to and from the suburbs. Mass transit has been permitted to decay.

The major impetus to this pattern has been the abundance of federal funds -- ninety percent -- for expressways combined with a scarcity of funds for other means of transportation, including both mass transit and the improvement of major arterial streets.

Suburban car ownership has reached the point where two cars (or more) are considered by millions as an absolute necessity. Those who have no access to cars must suffer the consequences in the form of highly restricted mobility.

Who are these have-nots? They are the handicapped, the poor, the elderly, and the young -- and let us note that subsidized transportation to school does not meet the need for cheap transportation after school hours to the library, the museum, the zoo, or the park. Our transportation policies are denying many of our young people the free access to the world of experience which should be their right.

We need a participative process of metropolitan transportation planning -- right down to the neighborhood and block level -- oriented toward increasing the mobility of those who are today's have-nots. Such a process would undoubtedly lead to more rapid

rail transit in dense corridors, more busways, and new types of rubber-tired vehicles that can run both on streets and in subways. A related idea is a dual propulsion vehicle that can run on suburban rail extensions as a collector, and then enter the subway system. Dial-a-bus, jitney services, and maxi-cabs are promising for many situations. If we take seriously each citizen's right, from early age to advanced years, to interact at will with those parts of his environment which interest him, we will develop the transportation systems to make that interaction possible.

Consider land use. We are recklessly squandering the natural environment which is our children's heritage. Our fragmented government agencies, as presently constituted, seem incapable of controlling the damage and depletion of the natural world by special interests. We must work toward metropolitan and state-wide institutions with the power to enforce regulations. We should have controls on the national level to ensure overall ecological balance. We need pollution controls with teeth in them.

Cities must become more selective about the type and location of new industries, recognizing that industry may be not only a source of pollution but a direct source of danger to children. Efforts must be made to get more land into public ownership and to develop parks and open space both outside the present cities in trusteeship for the future, and within the cities of today. Communities should explore the possibilities of assembling and making available new land for well-planned development, and governments should thoroughly research the possibility of developing new communities outside major metropolitan areas.

PS 004232

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

Our streets and buildings are deteriorating. We need programs for preventive maintenance and rehabilitation of the existing stock of housing. We should stop permitting housing to decay to the point where the only option is new construction -- usually of units much too costly for the families whose need is greatest, and too cramped for children in any case. It will take considerable revision of our tax regulations, and very considerable public investment programs on an area-wide basis, to halt the decay and actual abandonment of housing on a large scale in our cities.

More than eighty percent of present community solid waste systems have defects which render them unacceptable by Public Health Service standards. Urban areas are steadily becoming noisier, presenting physical and mental problems to the residents.

Financial, political, and architectural leaders have tended to dominate city planning efforts. Ecologists must now be included in the planning, and ordinary citizens must participate to express their interest in the preservation of a humane environment.

Our children deserve to have their environment protected for them. Our public controls and public policies do not now provide that protection.

Consider the class- and race-segregated pattern of urban growth. Polarization between inner city and suburbs has been encouraged by a number of government policies and public practices such as local exclusionary zoning practices; reliance on local, real property taxation as the financial basis for schools and other services; programs for highway building; and federal

mortgage insurance programs. We now see a pattern of urban life which encourages and permits wealthy suburban communities to "zone out" families who cannot pay their way in terms of local property taxes. One ugly consequence in some communities has been restrictions against families with children, in order to avoid the need for educational services. Another consequence is de facto segregation in schools, and general and damaging separation of children of different races or economic classes. Another consequence is denial of freedom of choice to those families, and their children, who wish to move out of the central city but who cannot because of exclusionary zoning practices. Still another is denial of the basic principle of equal educational opportunity to all children, since the local tax bases of different communities produce school systems of widely varying quality. The present local tax system compounds problems by forcing communities with large numbers of low-income families to provide services from a restricted tax base. This regressive character of the present system leads families on stable or declining incomes to be suspicious of any proposal for increased government spending, even to benefit their own community.

We believe it will be necessary to make the funding of local services -- at least schools -- dependent on a less regressive and less localized tax. Our preference would be a state-wide income tax, with revenues redistributed on a per-student basis to the districts of the state. We see a need for state action to prohibit the kinds of local regulation that now perpetuate both exclusive communities and impoverished communities.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

In considering these specific problems, the forum saw a basic issue in how problems are attacked. We felt that one important vehicle for both the change of attitudes and the institution of specific programs is community organization. We also felt that active and enlightened young people are likely to come from involved parents. If institutions of community life and group discussion were developed, and if processes for participation in planning were created, improvement would be easier. If communities were involved in all federally funded programs, the programs would be more effective. They could serve to support and stimulate community life. They could show children, by example, their future roles and responsibilities in the community.

The environment in which our children are now growing up is not the humane world that we could create. That lack is not the result of irresistible forces of nature working against us; it results from our own policies and programs that make our living environment less than the liberating framework for human joy and creation that it could be. We should change those policies and programs. We can and should create an environment fit for children to grow in, and one in which adults could be proud of being parents.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

GOALS

The primary goal is to create in the United States a physical and social environment which is healthy, humane, and liberating for children and adults alike.

This primary goal implies other goals:

- Enough good dwelling units to house every family according to its needs and within its financial reach
- More balanced urban transportation systems
- More adequate controls on land use
- A reversal of the polarization between low-income and upper-income communities
- Community participation in planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals advanced by this forum reveal a pressing need for coordination. We need an evaluation of total results, not merely of each separate housing, transportaion, or land use program. We need to be sure that our attention is focused on the human consequences of each decision, not merely its financial or engineering consequences.

We recommend, therefore, that a Standing Commission for the Next Generation be constituted.

Need for a Commission. Our children are the most tender and vulnerable part of our human group. They are literally unable to act on their own behalf. They are also our entering wedge into the future. Upon them depends the health and well-being of the generations to come. They are a segment of our nation which is

literally unable to act on its own behalf. Yet they are affected by the actions of diverse groups in all areas of the country, on all levels of government and across many jurisdictions. No existing agency can possibly cover or control the various actions which influence their welfare.

The work of such specialized bodies as the Children's Bureau and Office of Child Development is important and should continue. But these organizations have as their task the advocacy of the special needs of children as a distinctive and dependent population, and must, therefore, engage in study and promotion of special facilities and programs for the special needs of children. Only a standing commission with the prestige of the President and Congress behind it can act both as a watch-dog and advocate of the interests of the next generation and thus work toward providing a healthier environment for all mankind.

Functions and Duties of the Commission. This commission must have the mandate to monitor and analyze programs and legislation affecting the lives of our children and youth. It should keep a watchful eye on areas such as health and education, commonly associated with the welfare of our children. It should also examine proposals impinging on the lives of the coming generation, in such fields as justice, housing, zoning, transportation, and urban planning. Its point of departure should always be: What will this do to our children and the world they live in now and in the future?

To best carry on its functions, the commission should be empowered to hold hearings, subpoena witnesses, monitor and

investigate programs at all levels of government. It should be specifically charged to solicit advice from children and youth. Through its advisory powers, it should not only analyze existing programs and proposed legislation but suggest means of implementing its own recommendations. The broad scope of its functions will enable the commission to strengthen the existing agencies involved in operating programs for children or research and demonstrations relating to children, by giving them support and direction.

Legal Structure. To be most effective, the commission should be created by statute on a continuing or permanent basis as a Presidential Advisory Commission. It should be required to report periodically to the president and through him to Congress. This structure will give the commission both the stamp of Congressional approval and make it eligible to receive public funds. The commission will be dealing with matters of long-range significance and, therefore, must have continuing responsibility. The problems of children and youth are continually with us and should always receive public attention.

Financing. Adequate financing is essential. The main source of funds should be public appropriation. Recently certain commissions (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental relations and the newly created Advisory Commission on Libraries, for example) have been given the right to accept donations from additional sources such as other levels of government and foundations. This type of additional financing should be considered for the Commission for the Next Generation.

(THIS IS WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

Composition of the Commission. The commission should be composed of about fifteen members, whose qualifications and credibility will command respect both from officials and the public. They should include people who have been directly involved with children and youth of varying economic, social, and minority groups. Terms of office could be five years, with tenure of the initial appointees staggered so that no more than one-third of the terms expire in any one year. This will provide both continuity and change in the composition of the commission. Confirmation of the appointments by the Senate would provide additional status and bi-partisan support. To carry on its duties in the best possible manner, the commission must be able to hire a top-notch staff. Permanent tenure and adequate financing are both important toward this end. In addition, the commission should have a working relationship with federal agencies, local, state, and regional government units, and private research groups.

This forum further recommends that:

- Present housing programs should be changed and future programs designed to produce more dwelling units and, particularly, more subsidized units for lower income families so that every family can be well housed
- Urban transportation systems should be better balanced to serve the needs of all, without destroying neighborhoods or the natural environment

- Controls on land use should be strengthened, extended, and coordinated to prevent the squandering of our remaining natural environment and halt the deterioration of our cities
- Zoning and taxation policies should be changed to help reverse the polarization of our cities between low- and upper-income communities
- Mechanisms should be established for community participation in all planning.

The recommendations in this report for changes in policy require action at the local, state, and federal levels. We wish especially to point to the need for very determined action at the federal level.

These recommendations demand immediate action. The damage we are doing to our environment every day through some of our actions is not easy to reverse; in some instances it may be irreversible. But beyond that there is a greater urgency. When we create an environment which is bad for children to grow up in, we are damaging children. That is a kind of damage which we have an absolute moral obligation to stop.

(THIS IS A WORKING COPY - SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION.)

FORUM #19 MEMBERS

Lisa Redfield Peattie (Chairman)

Morton Hoppenfeld (Vice Chairman)

Margaret Bates

Edward Carlin

Richard Dattner

Nathaniel George

Robert Hatcher

Dwight Jewson

Faye Olin Johnson

Stanley Lewis

Edward Logue

Dorothy Newman

Autry Parker

Mary Queeley

Rudolph Sutton

Shirley Patterson (Coordinator)

Nan Galbraith (Coordinator)